

## **Tourism and Recreation Focus Group**

**October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Minnesota Discovery Center**

**4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.**

**In Attendance:** Beth Pierce, Allyse Freeman, Sara Ferkul, Jim Makowsky, Dave Setnicker, Jen Paolo, Chelsea Thompson, Larry Killien, Desiree Yourczek and Kim Sampson

Introductions and why they are here.

Recap of Recharge the Range and the initiatives that came out of it, led by Allyse and Beth.

### **General Discussion:**

What is considered the iron range? What areas should be focused on? Tourism needs a bigger voice to show the importance of tourism in this area. Capitalizing on the trails in our area. This area's culture is unique. Community calendar, the tourism bureau already has a calendar, however, it is very rare for community members to actually call Beth and submit events. It's difficult for her to spend such a large amount of time going out and searching for events. Hometown Focus also offers a community calendar. How can we join together to have a one stop shop and see one calendar? Should a tourist tax be imposed in this area?

Duplication of efforts has been an issue, especially when it comes to marketing.

Discussion of inviting Giants Ridge to these meetings. There was also discussion on the difference between the Giants Ridge marketing budget to the Iron Range Tourism Bureau's budget. Is there a way to piggyback off of events that are held at Giants Ridge? Bundle things together, one day skiing, possible mine tour the following, staying at different hotels. Make it an experience. Collaboration with Giants Ridge is important, especially with towns nearby.

Branding the Iron Range is important. The sad part is a lot of people are unaware when they are actually on the range. Where it starts and where it ends.

Tourism in this area is important. Some people don't believe that tourism will bring enough work into the area. Educating people about the benefits of tourism is high on the list. All communities must join together to focus on the "best kept secret" of Minnesota. Possibly focusing on tourism more than mining. Mining and logging always have a high and low but we need to level out the tourism side of it. Tourism is economic development. Building up our towns to redevelopment the region is number one. Then everyone can start working together towards a common goal. Crosby area is a great example, they were able to capitalize on the loss of mining in their area by building bike trails. Start to show pride in the range. Using vacant buildings to host pop up shops.

The older generation, and some younger, may struggle with change and trying new things. It's been difficult in cities/towns to get them to utilize social media. Social media a way to communicate to a large group of people while still keeping costs down. It can also be used to advertise events in the area as well. Right now, the focus should be on the people that want to make a positive change in the area, maybe moving forward more people will want to join forces to build the region up.

A lot of the open space in the area is owned by mines. When moving forward with an initiative that may cause an issue. Possible lease with the mining companies?

**Possible Initiatives:**

- Partnering with the Minnesota Arrowhead Association - they will be hosting a Tourism Summit in 2017.
- Hosting a PR Campaign to educate people in the area of the importance of tourism. Kim Sampson may be able to gain some media attention from WDIO, she used to work there. Maybe we can compile a series of mini stories for the media to concentrate on. Jim Makowsky to head that followed by a strategic plan.
- Welcoming to outsiders. Do we have a welcoming committee? Does that fall on the chambers of the area? Possibly having a tab on the chambers webpage as well as the Iron Range Tourism Bureau for people that may be moving into this area. Maybe after completing a small survey a care package can be brought to the new family.
- Community Calendar. How can we create a larger platform for people to submit events onto one calendar? How to go about sharing the calendar?

**Next Meeting:**

**November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.**

**Minnesota Discovery Center**